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SUBJECT: BASRAH GOVERNOR ALLEGES IRANIAN ASSASSINATION PLOT

CLASSIFIED BY: Howell Howard, Regional Coordinator, Regional Embassy Office Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Basrah Provincial Governor, Muhammed Musbeh Wa'eli, met with Regional Embassy (REO) officers on February 24 to substantiate his public allegation that the Iranian Government was directly involved in a recent assassination plot against Wa'eli and his brother. At a February 23 press conference, Wa'eli promised to provide specific evidence of Iranian complicity in the plot. (Note: This prompted denials to the media by Iranian Ambassador Qomi in Baghdad. End Note.)

¶2. (C) Wa'eli believes an assassination attempt had been planned for February 23 or 24. He first learned of the alleged plot when his bodyguards told him that Iranian agents working for GOI intelligence had repeatedly offered his bodyguards cash both for information regarding movements and to change movement routes. Wa'eli said he ordered his protective detail to conduct counter intelligence operations, which revealed connections between the Iranian Consulate and members of the Iraqi police and security forces in Basrah. His security detail was able to determine attack points where the ambush was to take place, and found RPG-7s that allegedly were to have been used in an ambush. Wa'eli maintained that the attackers could not plant IEDs due to the heavily guarded stretch of road; moreover, using EFPs would have been a telltale sign of Iranian involvement.

¶3. (C) Wa'eli said the Iranian Consulate in Basra had informed leadership within Fadhila (Wa'eli's party) last week that the Iranian opposition group Mujahideen al-Khalq was planning to assassinate the Governor circa February 23. He believes the Consulate's tip to Fadhila was simply an attempt to deflect blame from the Iranian Government. (Note: On February 24, two RPGs were fired at the Iranian Consulate causing no damage or injuries. It is not yet clear if that event is linked to the Iranian Consulate's alleged involvement in the assassination plot against Wa'eli. End Note)

¶4. (C) Wa'eli said that Basrah Director of Security Major General Jalil Khalaf Shuwayl and Basrah Operations Commander Lieutenant General Mohan Hafith Fahad also warned him of the Iranian-supported plot. In addition, Wa'eli claims to have "other sources" to back up his charges and offered to have those sources meet with REO Basrah to provide more specific evidence. REO will canvas contacts over the next week regarding Wa'eli's allegations, but on February 25 at least one of REO's trusted contacts, businessman/journalist Awad al Abdan, told us that it was no secret that the Iranians had been trying to kill Wa'eli.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: There is no love lost between Wa'eli and Iran. The governor has often told us of his enmity for Iranian interference in Basrah. Multiple sources not affiliated with Wa'eli's Fadhila party confirm that Wa'eli despises Iran. Whether there was a plot or not, Wa'eli's press conference was a personal no-lose proposition. He created an opportunity to lay

at the feet of the Iranians serious allegations without benefit of proof. On the off-chance the Iranians were complicit, Wa'eli's chronicle of a death foretold would give them cause to think twice.

16. (C) Wa'eli's press conference also could be viewed as handing Tehran its come-uppance following a slight in Wa'eli's own backyard. Last week, Wa'eli complained to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) after the Iranian consulate sought to display Iranian flags at the Southern Oil Company conference center at an event to honor the 29th anniversary of the Iranian revolution. According to Wa'eli, the PMO retorted that Iran had the right to host the event and display its flag. Adding insult to injury, the PMO ordered Wa'eli to attend the event. The governor however refused to attend and instead cut the power to the conference center during the event. END COMMENT.

HOWARD